Glow

Book: 84

Nevaeh

Marcel Ray Duriez

21 Meanings

When I woke up, I was confused. My thoughts were confused, still twisted in dreams and nightmares; It took me longer than I should realize where I was. This room was too boring to belong anywhere other than a hotel. The bedside lamps attached to the tables were a real treat, as were the long curtains of the same fabric as the bedspread and the generic watercolor prints on the walls. I tried to remember how I got here, but

nothing came at first. I remembered the shiny black car, the windows darker than those of a sedan. The engine was silent despite driving on black highways at more than twice the legal speed. And I remembered Naddalin Natalie sitting with me in the dark leather back seat. Somehow my head had fallen against his granite neck during the long night.

She did not seem bothered at all by my proximity and her cold, hard skin comforted me strangely. The front of his thin cotton shirt was cold, wet from the tears that flowed

from my eyes until they were dry, red, and sore. Sleep had escaped me; My sore eyes widened even as the night was finally ending, and dawn was breaking over a low peak somewhere in California. The gray light that crossed the cloudless sky caught my attention. But I could not close them; As I did this, the images that flashed all too vividly, like still images behind my covers, were unbearable. Charlie's broken expression - Melvin's brutal growl, bared teeth - Vivian's vengeful gaze - the tracker's watchful gaze - the

dead look in Melvin's eyes after he kissed me last time…

I could not bear to see her. So, I fought my fatigue and the sun rose higher. I was still awake when we crossed a flat mountain pass and, now behind us, the sun was reflecting off the tiled roofs of the Valle del Sol. I did not have enough emotion to be surprised that I had taken a three-day trip in one. I stared blankly at the wide, flat expanse that stretched before me. Phoenix - palm trees, shrub creosote, random lines of intersecting highways, verdant

expanses of golf courses, and turquoise patches of swimming pools, all bathed in thin smog and embraced by short rocky ridges that are not big enough they had to be called mountains.

The shadows of the palm trees slanted across the highway: defined, sharper than I remembered, fainter than they should have been. Nothing could hide in those shadows. The bright, open highway looked benign enough. But I felt no relief, no sense of homecoming. 'Which way for the trains station, Lily?' Jae had

asked, and I flinched, even though his voice was quite sweet and disturbing. It was the first sound, other than the hum of the car, that broke the silence of the long night: 'Keep on I-Ten,' I answered automatically.

'We will pass by.' My brain had been working slowly through the haze of sleep deprivation. 'Let's go somewhere?' I had asked Naddalin Natalie: 'No, but it's better to be around, just in case.' I remembered starting the tour around Sky Harbor International ... but not finishing it. It

was when I fell asleep. Although now that I was chasing the memories, I had a vague idea of getting out of the car - the sun was just dipping below the horizon - my arm was draped over Naddalin Natalie's shoulder and her arm wrapped around my waist, pulling me forward as he stumbled through the warm, dry shadows. I had no memory of this room. I looked at the digital clock on the bedside table. The red numbers said it was three o'clock but did not indicate whether it was day or night. No streak of light escaped the thick

curtains, but the room was illuminated by the light of the lamps.

I stood up stiffly and staggered to the window, pulling back the curtains. It was dark outside. So, three in the morning. My room overlooked a deserted stretch of the highway and the new long-stay trains station parking lot. It was reassuring to be able to pinpoint the exact time and place. I looked at myself. I was still wearing Karly's clothes and they did not fit me at all. I looked around the room and was happy to spot my duffel bag on top of

the low dresser. I was on my way to find some new clothes when a light knock on the door made me jump: 'May I come in?'

Naddalin Natalie asked. I took a deep breath. 'Clear.' He entered and looked at me cautiously. 'Looks like you might be sleeping late,' he said. I just shook my head. He silently walked over to the curtains and closed them tightly before turning back to me. 'We have to stay inside,' he told me. 'All right'. My voice was hoarse; cracked 'Thirsty?' churches. I shrugged. 'I'm

fine and you?' 'Nothing overwhelming.' She smiled. 'I ordered some food for you; he is in the first room. Melvin reminded me that you must eat a lot more often than we do.' I was immediately more alert. 'Called?' 'No,' he said, watching my face drop. 'That was before we left.' He carefully took my hand and led me through the door into the living room of the hotel suite. I could hear a low hum of voices coming from the TV. Jae sat motionless at the desk in the corner, his eyes watching the news without a

glimmer of interest. I sat on the floor next to the coffee table where he was waiting for a tray of food and started pecking at him, not realizing what I was eating.

Naddalin Natalie sat on the arm of the sofa and stared blankly at the TV like Jae. I ate slowly, watching her, turning from time to time to take a quick look at Jae. He was beginning to realize they were too quiet. They never took their eyes off the screen, even though the commercials were airing now. I pushed the tray away, my stomach suddenly nauseous.

Naddalin Natalie was looking at me: 'What's going on Naddalin Natalie?' I asked, 'There is nothing wrong'. His eyes were big, honestly ... and I did not trust them. 'What do we do now?' 'We're waiting for Melchor to call.'

'And should he have called now?' I could see that I was near the door. Naddalin Natalie's eyes darted from mine on the phone to her leather bag and back. 'What does it mean?' My voice was shaking, and I was struggling to control it. 'Who hasn't called yet?' 'It just means they have nothing to tell us.' But his voice

was too even, and the air was harder to breathe. Jae was suddenly next to Naddalin Natalie, closer to me than usual. 'Lily,' he said in a suspiciously reassuring voice. 'You have nothing to fear. You are perfectly safe here.' 'I know.' 'Then why are you afraid?' he asked confused. He could feel the tenor of my emotions, but he could not read the reasons why 'You heard what Emilyn said.' My voice was just a whisper, but I was sure they could hear me. 'he said Pierre was mortal. What if something goes wrong and they separate? If something happens

to either of them, Melchor, Dejen ... Eduard ...' I swallowed. 'If that wild whore hurts Karly...' My voice had risen, a hint of hysteria starting to rise in her.

'How could I live with myself when it is my fault? Neither of you should risk it for me -' Lily, Lily, stop it, 'she interrupted, her words pouring out so fast it was hard to swallow to understand. Wrong things, Lily. Believe me, none of us is in danger. They are too stressed out the way they are; Don't add that to completely unnecessary worries.

Listen to me!' He ordered because I had looked away. 'Our family is strong. Our only fear is losing you.' 'But why would you-' Naddalin Natalie cut him off this time, touching my cheek with her cold fingers. 'It has been a century since Melvin was left alone. Now he has found you. You cannot see the changes we are seeing, we who have been with him for so long. Do you think some of us would like to look him in the eye for the next few? a hundred years, when will he lose you? ' My guilt slowly subsided as I

looked into his dark eyes. But even though the calm had settled over me, I knew 'that I could not trust my feelings with Jae there. It has been an exceptionally long day. We were in the room.

Naddalin Natalie called the front desk and asked them to ignore our housekeeping. for the moment. The windows remained closed, the TV on, even though no one saw it. Food was delivered to me at regular intervals. The silver phone resting on Naddalin Natalie's bag seemed to get bigger as the hours went by. My

babysitters handled the tension better than I.

As I fidgeted and walked, they grew more, two statues whose eyes followed me imperceptibly as I moved. I took care of memorizing the room; the striped pattern of the sofas, light brown, peach h, cream, dull gold, and tan again. Sometimes I would stare at abstract prints and randomly find images in shapes as I found images in the clouds as a child. I traced a blue hand, a woman combing her hair, a cat that stretches. But when the pale red

circle became a steady eye, I looked away. As the afternoon passed, I went back to bed just to do something. I hoped that alone in the dark I could give in to the terrible fears that hovered on the edge of my consciousness and could not break through under Jae's careful supervision.

Nevertheless, Naddalin Natalie followed me casually as if by chance she was getting tired of the entrance room at the same time. I was beginning to wonder what kind of instructions Melvin had given her

exactly. I lay down on the bed and she sat down next to me, cross-legged. At first, I ignored her, suddenly tired enough to sleep. But after a few minutes, the panic that had remained in Jae's presence made itself felt. Then I gave up on the idea of going to sleep quickly, curled up in a ball, and wrapped my arms around my legs 'Naddalin Natalie?' I asked 'Yes?'

I kept my voice very calm. 'What do you think they are doing?' 'Melchor wanted to take the pursuer as far north as possible, wait for him

to approach, then turn and ambush him. Karly and Vivian should go west while they take the female behind them. She turned around, they should come back from McAuley and keep an eye on your dad. So, I guess things will be fine if they cannot call. It means the locator is close enough that you do not want it. 'I overheard. ' 'What about Karly?' 'I think she must be back in McAuley. She will not call if the female is likely to hear. I expect everyone to be incredibly careful.' Do you think they are safe? 'Lily, how many times do we have to

tell you that there is no danger for us?' 'But would you tell me the truth?'

'Yes. I will always tell you the truth.' His voice was serious. I thought about it for a moment and decided he meant it, 'So tell me ... How did you become a vampire?' My question surprised her. She was calm. I turned to face her, and her expression seemed ambivalent. 'Melvin does not want me to tell you, 'She said firmly, but I heard she disagreed. 'It is not fair. Me.' a right to know. 'I know. 'I looked at her and

waited. She sighed.' He will be extremely angry. 'None of his business. This is between you and me, Naddalin Natalie, as a friend, please.' And now we were friends, a little bit - as he must have always known we had always been. She looked at me with those glorious, wise eyes... choose.

'I'll explain the mechanics,' she finally said, 'but I do not remember it by myself, and I have never done or seen it, so remember I can only tell you the theory. I waited. ' As predators, we have an excess of

weapons in our physical arsenal, much, much more than is needed. Power, speed, acute senses, not to mention those like Melvin, Jae, and me who also have additional senses. And then, like a carnivorous flower, we are physically attractive to our prey. 'I was very still, remembering how clearly Melvin had demonstrated the same concept to me in the meadow.

She smiled with a wide, sinister smile.' We have another quiet one. redundant weapon. We are poisonous too, 'he said, his teeth

glistening.' Poison does not kill; it just renders us incapable. It works slowly and spreads through the bloodstream so that once we bite our prey it has too much physical pain to escape from us. Mostly superfluous, as I said. When we are this close, the prey will not escape. Of course, there are always exceptions. Melchor, for example.

'Well ... if you let the poison spread ... 'I mumbled.' It takes a few days to complete the transformation depending on how much poison is in the bloodstream, and how close the

poison gets to the heart. If the heart continues to beat, the poison spreads, healing and altering the body as it moves through it. Eventually, the heart stops and the conversion are complete. But all the time, every minute, a victim would want death. It is not pleasant, you know? 'Melvin said it was exceedingly difficult to do ... I do not understand,' I said. We too are like sharks in a way. Once we taste or even smell the blood, it becomes exceedingly difficult to stop it from feeding. Sometimes impossible. So,

you see, biting someone, tasting the blood, would start the frenzy. It is hard on both sides: the bloodlust on one side, the terrible pain on the other. 'Why do you think you don't remember?'

I do not know. For everyone else, the pain of transformation is the sharpest memory they have of their human lives. I remember nothing of human beings. 'Her voice was melancholy. We gig in silence, wrapped in our meditations. Seconds passed and I had almost forgotten her presence, I

was so caught up in my thoughts. Then Naddalin Natalie jumped out of bed without notice and she landed lightly on her feet. My head jumped as I stared at her in horror.

'Something has changed.' Her voice was urgent, and she no longer spoke to me. She reached the door at the same time as Jae. It was evident that she had overheard our conversation and his sudden exclamation. He put his hands on her shoulders and led her back to the bed, putting her on the edge.' he asked intently, staring into her eyes. His eyes were fixed on

something far away. I sat next to her and leaned over to hear her deep, fast voice. I see a room. It is long and there are mirrors everywhere.

The floor is made of wood. He is in the room waiting. There's gold ... a strip of gold on the mirrors. 'Where's the room?' 'I do not know. Something is missing, another decision has not yet been made.' 'How much time?' be in the mirror room today or maybe tomorrow. It depends. He is waiting for something. And now he is groping in the dark. 'Jae's voice was calm,

methodical as he virtually questioned her.' What is he doing? 'He's watching TV ... No, he is running a VCR, in the dark, in a different place. 'Can you see where it is?' 'No, it's too dark.' 'And the mirror room, what else is there?' 'Just the mirrors and the gold. It is a band running around the room. And there is a black table with a big stereo and a TV. You touch the VCR there, but it does not look like it does in the darkroom. That is, it. room he is waiting in.' Her eyes wandered, then focused on Jae's face. 'Isn't there anything else?' She

shook her head. They stared at each other without moving. 'What does that mean?' I asked. Neither answered for a moment, then Jae looked at me. 'It means the tracker's plans have changed. He has made a decision that will lead him to the mirror room and the dark room.' But we do not know where those rooms are.

'No. 'But we know he will not be in the mountains north of Washington, to be kicked out. He will evade them.' Naddalin Natalie's voice was dark: 'Shall we call?' I asked.

They exchanged serious, undecided glances. And the phone rang. Naddalin Natalie was across the room before I could raise my head to look at her. He pushed a button and put the phone to his ear, but he did not speak first. 'Melchor' he whispered. She did not seem surprised or relieved the way I felt. 'Yes,' she said, looking at me. He listened for a long time: 'I just saw it.' He again described the vision he had seen. 'Whatever got him on that plane ... brought him into these rooms.' It stopped.

'Yes,' Naddalin Natalie said on the phone, and then spoke to me. 'Pretty?' He handed me the phone. I ran upstairs. 'Hello?' 'Lily,' he sighed in frustration, 'I told you not to worry about anything but yourself.' It was so incredibly beautiful to hear his voice. The floating cloud of despair lightened and rolled back as he spoke. 'Where are you?' 'We're out of Vancouver. Lily, I am sorry - we lost him. He seems suspicious of us - he makes sure he stays far enough away that he cannot hear what he is thinking. But now he is gone - he

looks like he has boarded a plane. We think he is back in McAuley to start over.' I could hear Naddalin Natalie fill Jae behind me, her quick words mingling into a hum. 'I know. Naddalin Natalie saw him escape.' 'You do not have to worry though.

He will not find anything that brings him to you.' You just must stay there and wait for us to find him. 'I will be fine. Is Karly with Charlie? 'Yes, the female was in town. She went home, but while Charlie was at work. She did not come close to him, so do not worry. He will be safe with

Karly and Vivian watching him. 'What are you doing?' 'Probably trying to track down. That night she was walking around town. Vivian followed her through the trains station, all the streets in town, the school ... She is digging, Lily, but there is nothing to do with it. to find.'

'And are you sure Charlie is safe?' Yes, Karly does not let his eyes pop out. And we will be there soon. If the locator gets anywhere near McAuley, we will have it. 'I miss you,' I whispered. I know Believe me I know. It is as if you yourself took half

of me.' 'Get it,' I challenged. Quick, as fast as possible. I will get you safe first. 'His voice was hard.' I love you, 'I reminded him. Could you believe that despite everything I have done to you, I still love you?' Yes, I really can. '' I will be there for you. 'I will wait for you. 'As soon as the phone went out, the cloud of depression began to creep over me again. I turned to hand the phone back to Naddalin Natalie and found her and Jae hunched over the table where Naddalin Natalie was drawing on a piece of hotel paper. I leaned back on

the sofa and looked over her shoulder. She drew a room: long, rectangular, with a thinner square section at the back. The planks. of the wooden floor that made up the floor stretched lengthwise across the room.

There were lines on the walls indicating the breaks in the mirrors.

-And-

Then, wrapping the walls at waist height, a long ribbon. The band that Naddalin Natalie said was gold. 'It's a dance studio,' I said, suddenly

recognizing the familiar shapes. They looked at me in surprise, 'Do you know this room?' Jae's voice was calm, but there was an undertone of something I could not identify.' Naddalin Natalie lowered her tea stands in front of his work, his hand now flying over the page, the shape of an emergency exit taking shape on the back wall, the stereo and TV on a low table in the front right corner. ' Looks like a place I have been taking dance lessons since - when I was eight or nine. It was the same shape. 'I touched the side where the square

section protruded, limiting the back of the room.'

There were the bathrooms - the doors were across the other dance floor. But the stereo was there '- I pointed to the left corner -' it was older and there was no TV. There was a window in the waiting room - you would see the room. 'See it from this perspective when you look through it.' Naddalin Natalie and Jae stared at me 'Are you sure it's the same room?' Jae asked, still calm. 'No, not at all - I suppose most dance studios would look the same - the

mirrors, the bar.' I ran my finger along the dance bar pointing towards the mirrors. 'It's just the shape that looked familiar.'

I touched the door, in the same place as the one I remembered. 'Do you have any reason to go there now?' Naddalin Natalie asked, breaking my reverie. 'No, I have not been there for ten years. I was a terrible dancer - they always put me on the back burner for recitals,' I admitted. So, there is no way it could be related to you? 'Naddalin Natalie asked carefully.' No, I do not even

think the same person owns it. I am sure it is just another dance studio somewhere.

'Where was the studio you went to? 'Jae asked casually.' It was just around the corner from my mother's house. I walked there after school ... 'I said, my voice going out. I did not miss the look they exchanged.' So here in Phoenix? 'His voice was still nonchalant.' Yes, 'I whispered.' Fifty-eighth Street and cactus. 'We all sat in silence, staring at the drawing.' Naddalin Natalie, is the phone safe? 'Yes, 'he reassured

me.' The number would just go back to Washington. Then I can use him to call my mom. 'I thought he was in California.

'He is ... but he'll be home soon, and he can't go back to this house until...' My voice was shaking. I thought of something Melvin had said about the red-haired woman at Charlie's house at school, where my records would be. 'How are you going to achieve her?' 'They don't have a landline, except at home - you should check your messages regularly.' Jae? 'Naddalin Natalie

asked. She thought about it.' I do not think it will hurt in any way, make sure you do not say where you are, of course. 'I grabbed the phone eagerly and dialed the familiar number. It rang four times, and then I heard my mother's ethereal voice telling me to leave a message. 'Mom,' I said after the beep, 'it is me. Look, I need you to do something. This is important. As soon as you get this message, call me on this number. 'Naddalin Natalie was already by my side, writing the number at the bottom of her picture.

I read it carefully, twice.' Please do not go anywhere until you talk to me.

Do not worry, I am fine, but I need to talk to you right away, no matter how late you get this call, okay? I love you, mom. Hi. 'I closed my eyes and prayed with all my might that no unexpected changes in plans would bring her home before she got my message. I settled on the sofa and munched on a plate of leftover fruit, anticipating a long evening. thought about calling Charlie but did not know if I had to be home now or not. I focused on the

news, listening to stories about California or spring training - strikes or hurricanes or terrorist attacks - whatever could send her home soon. immortality must grant infinite patience. Neither Jae nor Naddalin Natalie felt the need to do anything. For a while, Naddalin Natalie sketched the vague outlines of the darkroom from her sight as far as she could see in the TV light.

Likewise, when she finished, she just sat and looked at the white walls with her timeless eyes. Jae also did not seem to have

the urge to leave, look through the curtains or run out the door screaming as I did. I must have fallen asleep on the couch waiting for the phone to ring again. The touch of Naddalin Natalie's cold hands woke me briefly as she carried me to the bed, but I was unconscious again before my head hit the pillow.

I dug into my backpack and pulled out the crumpled, stained, completely empty packet of paper that had once been my math homework. I had dropped it at the bottom of my bag and forgotten

about it - as I had done with most of my homework. The problem was that it was due today. I sighed and reached out to tap the shoulder of the girl sitting in front of me. She turned, her blonde hair falling over her shoulder in a stream of molten gold.

'What?'

'Hey, Vivian,' I said, trying to keep my voice calm and even. Vivian was known to have a bad temper. Not to mention she was gorgeous, and both loved and hated by everyone at school. She gave me a

contemptuous look. I swallowed; my mouth surprisingly dry. 'I forgot to do today's homework and was wondering if I could take a look at yours?' I held my breath. Vivian rolled her eyes.

'Do your homework yourself, Wendi,' she turned to the professor.

bitch. I thought as I stared at the back of his perfect head with daggers. Of course, she ignored me. She was sitting straight, her posture perfect, her hands clasped in her lap, with her bundle of clean homework

in front of her. Just looking at her was enough to hurt me. My orange hair was pulled back into a messy ponytail, my homework was crumpled and dirty on the floor, and I sat slouched in my combat boots on the desk just because I knew Vivian would be annoyed.

'Jane? asked my teacher. I winced at the name.

'Wendi,' I corrected her. I hated my first name - always hated it. It sounded like a grandma's name or a paper doll or something, and I had

made sure to use my middle name since I was young.

'Okay, fine. Wendi.' She held out her hand to me for my homework. I could already see the disappointment on his face, the anticipation of my failure. I sighed.

'I didn't, Mrs. Wentworth,' I whispered. She said nothing but frowned and made a mark on her notepad.

That is how most teachers reacted when I did not do their homework: what more could you ask for from Wendi Madison, the

wayward girl who lived with her alcoholic aunt in the seedy trailer park? McAuley had his prejudices against me. It was good. By the time I finished high school, I left this oppressive city with its talkative, judgmental residents and stagnant gene pool.

I think the last time we had someone new was when the Shezor moved in, and before that - shit, I did not even remember anyone before them. It has been so long.

Anyway, what I meant was that McAuley sucked. And the sooner I was done with this, the better.

I slammed my tray on the cafeteria table angrily. Iris, a short Japanese girl with long black hair and glasses, jumped up.

'Shit, Wendi. What was that for?

'Wentworth. That old cow.' I muttered angrily. Iris smiled.

'Looks like someone didn't do their homework.'

'You're so boring,' I said but managed to smile at the same time. Iris nudged me.

'Too bad I'm your only friend.' I teased her.

'It's not like it's any different with you!' I protested. She shrugged. I looked at her and saw a glint of pain in her eyes.

'If I had to sit by the dumpsters with anyone and breathe fumes of rancid garbage, it would be with you,' I promised her. That is right, we were seated at the back of the cafeteria, huddled in our little

corner of the losers' table - affectionately called that by Iris because of its placement right next to the garbage cans. She put a hand on her chest and stared at me.

'Wow. That statement really warmed the deepest parts of my heart and soul,' she said sarcastically. I smiled Iris pulled a packet of ketchup from her 'food' tray, if you could call it that, it was meat (hopefully) mixed in a pale orange sauce, taken sandwiched between two slices of bread and soggy sweet potato fries.

She put it on the table in front of her so that the seam was angled towards the ceiling.

'Iris-' I wanted to say, but she banged her fist on the table so hard that the table wobbled, and everyone stared at her. The ketchup burst from the packet and was thrown towards the ceiling, where it caught on and slowly dripped onto the floor a few feet away. Mr. Parker, the man watching our lunch break, looking for people trying to cause trouble - just Iris - turned around.

'Shit,' Iris muttered, grabbing the carton of ketchup, and reaching under the table, then smiling innocently as he approached. He passed right in front of us. 'Works every time.' She smiled and then flinched. 'Ouch! '

What?!' I asked.

'I cut my hand on the side of that damn table,' she whispered. And then she said,

'Shit. I am bleeding.'

I did not know it then, but those words would change my life.

(That Night)

''Just touch me,'' she grumbled, cupping his hand impatiently. He could not keep any of them waiting any longer. Slowly, he lowered his middle finger and slid lightly over her folds. Jasmine tilted her head back. 'Oh my God, yes. continue. ' He did it again, this time sliding his fingertips over, collecting her moisture. He separated her with two fingers and found her, rubbing in small circles. She leaned against his lips and cried, then lost her way. The smell of her, the smell of her, the

feeling of her being so close to him, skin-to-skin. Time and space no longer make sense. She is alone.'

He leaned over to kiss me, his fingers still moving rhythmically inside me, his thumbs circling and pressing. His other hand scooped my hair from my head and held it in place. His tongue mirrored the movements of his fingers, demanding me. My legs started to stiffen as I pushed his hand. He stroked his hand lightly, so I was pulled back from the brink...I came immediately, repeatedly, and fell apart under

him...then I started building again...I came back to orgasm, calling his name. '

I hit my head against the glass and the heat beat my blood from where his tongue was driving me crazy.' My legs were bent against his back, urging him to get closer, and as I rocked onto him, my hands wrapped around his head to keep him still. Feeling his rough satin hair clinging to my sensitive inner thighs was defiant, raising my awareness of everything around me...

' Teeth. She would do it for him, it would be hot, but since he wanted to, He gets into her before he leaves like a gun, he needs to keep contact to a minimum.

Of course, at the thought of her he grabs his hair and pulls him down, pressing her soft, plump curves against him. She Her skin was hot and wet from the orgasm. Her pussy was wet and open, ready for him, begging him as she spread her legs and reached for his erection. By his ear, she Whispered, 'Strength, please.'

'Two fingers went into her, and her eyes went back to her head. He started to have a steady rhythm as his tongue flickered on her., she could not stop her hips from rising to meet his thrust. Oh god, she rode on his hands and covered his face with her sex. That must be bad. She told herself to stop. She could not. Somehow, she found her hands tangled in his short hair. Her body curled up tighter, clutching his fingers so we knew she could hear him every time he drove back to her slippery voice.'

'It is better to have sex with him in bed than against the door. Now he knows what she likes, the motions that make her moan and gasp and stick her fingers into her shoulders.

He sits up and turns towards her Smiling, her eyes fell on her bright red panties. She thanked Maddie in her heart for letting her wear the matching bra and panty set. Then all thoughts of Maddie and anyone else left her mind. He went like a bolt of lightning as she moved, he took off those panties as he

walked and threw them across the room. Then he started doing things to her with his fingers and mouth, almost knocking her out.'

But as he laughed, he was the first. Once she felt the hot liquid between her legs, it was pure blood like never before. 'That's it, that's it, dear,' he said. 'And you can't rebel against your master and master, Hamm?'

Now he undresses, takes out his hard, eager sex, and mounts her against her lap, continuing to stroke her for She works.

She twisted from side to side, kneading the soft sheets beside her into knots with both hands, her whole body turned pink, and her nipples were as hard as small stones. He could not resist them.

He bit them with his teeth, jokingly, without hurting her. He licked them with his tongue, then he licked her sex too, and he slowly mounted her as she struggled, blushed, and moaned under him.

Again, she arched her back. Her breasts were flushed red. He felt her tremble violently with reluctant

pleasure as he inserted his organs into hers.

A terrible cry was muffled by the hand covering the mouth. She was shaking so violently; she was almost going to lift him on top of her.

22 Harts Flutter

My heart throbbed painfully in my chest. Short breaths that barely suppressed the need for oxygen escaped from my lips. My whole-body aches from the haunting memory that haunts my vision.

'Lily, here I come.' Melvin's voice whispered softly in my ear. His lips brushed against my skin.

I backed off. He is not there. Not before.

Cold fingers wrapped around my palm, pulling it away from my throat.

'You can breathe, honey. There's air.'

The spokes in the air felt damp, hot, and heavy. I was acutely aware of the shower, the hot water mist that warmed the entire

bathroom. I am shivering. Every twitch in my shoulder trims the space my lungs can expand.

Melvin's dark eyes were in front of me, staring deeply at me. His hand was squeezing mine.

Can he squeeze sanity back into my body? Or at least some oxygen? He could put his hand on my head and squeeze the memory out of my mind forever.

Melchor told me that memory can be a prison. They keep you stuck in the past, keep you from being in the present, and blur your

thinking about the future. I aspire to be Naddalin Natalie Shezor. Get rid of the past. She was luckier than she knew.

'You'll get through it, Lily Natalie-Black,' Melvin whispered, his hand cupping my cheek. 'I know you can.'

'Let me forget, Melvin.' Those words strained between my breaths. I stared at the vampire through blurry vision. 'Just let it go.'

'One day, Lily,' he whispered, resting his forehead against mine. He breathed out

against my face, and I gasped. 'You won't be trapped in this sadness anymore.'

Chapter 1 - Watercolors

When cold hands rest on my hips, a shudder goes down my spine, pulling my body toward a perfect marble. The cotton dragged across my palm as I grabbed the fabric of his shirt.

'Three days.' I sighed. three days. three nights.

'We'll be fine, Lily.' Melvin's lips touched mine, his cool breath on my face.

'There's only so much I can do,' I muttered. For the past few weeks, I have neglected to do laundry and dishes, as well as many other chores. I rarely do it until Charlie and I are struggling to find a clean shirt or plate. Sleep is also something I avoid when I make up for lost time with Melvin. We spent most of the time curled up in my bed chatting. There is a lot to discuss. So much to protect me from the

nightmares that occasionally plague me.

'I'll be back before you know it.'

His words made my heart skip a beat. Does he know how scared I am sometimes that he will leave and not come back? Will I wake up and realize this is a twisted, hellish nightmare that pops into my head?

Usually, Naddalin Natalie would hang out with me when Melvin was not around - even for a few hours. But this time, she went with

him. I am not desperate enough to beg another Karen to be with me while they are gone - but.

'I'm being selfish.' My fingers tightened around his shirt as I spoke. I hope he does not have to go. I hope he does not have the animal instinct to hunt blood.

'It's my own fault.' He sighed, running his fingers over my shoulder. 'I should hunt more often.'

Melvin's dark eyes closed, and he took a deep breath, holding it in his lungs until I thought twice. He took my scent to heart for the

millionth time. This is a habit he developed after our traumatic visit to Volterra. Without his modification, his memory could recall my scent in unnaturally perfect ways. But he always took a little extra time to remind himself before leaving me.

'Three days,' he whispered again, shaking his head. 'I will be back soon. Time flies—for both of us.'

I nodded, swallowing hard. I pretend I believe him. Time will drag on - for both of us.

Melvin chuckled and shook his head. 'I am just afraid of leaving

you. Afraid of what trouble you will get in my absence.'

My eyes rolled automatically. 'I'll be fine, I haven't done anything adventurous lately.'

'That means Danger will have something ready for you soon.' His lips touched my forehead. 'Do me a favor?' He looked at me, his black eyes meeting mine.

'Anything.'

'Please meet that idiot here.'

My jaw clenched, and I immediately regretted my commitment. 'Whether you like it or not, I'll go to Raush.'

Melvin had lost interest in my friendship with him after discovering that Jack was a wolf. If anything, the initial bitterness when I got back from Volterra delighted him. Recently, to Melvin's dismay, Chiaz and I have reconciled and are back on track with our regular gatherings in La Push. Jack called yesterday to plan, and I ended up being free this weekend.

'Please let go of Jack,' I said, although I regretted it almost immediately. I do not want to fight when he is leaving. Melvin's grimace kept me going. 'He's never done anything that could hurt me.'

'Naddalin Natalie can't see you there.'

'I'm as safe with him as with you.'

I did not add that Melvin disapproved of how much my friendship with Jack was Hypocrisy, as if he did not try to kill me in the first place out of a bloody lust for me.

My safety with Jack does not depend on my ability to not bleed - and I am bad at keeping my skin intact.

'Couples usually communicate over the phone. Not their sister's psychic abilities,' I added quietly, trying to lighten the mood. What mainstream relationship tips even apply to us as a couple?

Melvin sighed again and pulled me closer to him. 'Just—please, for me—be careful.' He read out every word. 'Call me if anything happens or you need me to get home sooner.' His voice was firm, and his

fingers stroked my neck gently as he said the next words. 'I love you.'

'I love you too,' I muttered, feeling my cheeks heat.

'I'll be back soon.'

Before I could react, my hand fell to my side, and he had already left. My room feels empty. My body felt light when his hand disappeared. I felt almost weightless, as if gravity no longer applied to me without Melvin holding me in place.

'I'll wait.' I muttered to anyone.

Three days and three nights without Melvin. I know as much as anyone why Melvin needs to hunt, especially now that we are testing the boundaries of intimacy. Even the slightest loss of control meant I could be seriously injured. But every trip leaves me miserable and lonely, no matter the length of time. They brought back nightmares from a painful and initially permanent absence from my life. This gave me a slight sense of self-loathing about my dependence on him.

I took a deep breath and shivered trying to push the depression out of my system. Jack will be here in a few hours, and I will spend the rest of the day with him at Rez. That would make me forget things. But today Charlie's gone, and I have been left alone until Jack arrives. I already know that I need to wash dishes and do laundry. There is also an English paper on Hamlet that is due. I usually like any excuse to reread the script, but today I was not in the mood.

I handed myself over to chores and homework, grabbed my thick hair and tied it into a low ponytail at the base of my neck. I set my phone to the loudest ringer setting and put it on the desk within arm's reach in case someone—especially Melvin—calls. Then, nearly tripping over a stack of books, I picked up a pile of dirty laundry in the corner of the room. I also laughed aloud as I went downstairs, thinking of Melvin's remarks about the imminent danger.

The dirty laundry was put away, cycled in the washing machine, and I started doing the dishes. Not as much as I hoped. Charlie must have done some before going fishing with Billy. Washing, drying, and putting away the dishes took less time than I expected. When I finished the laundry, the clothes were still spinning around in the machine. I took the opportunity to sweep the kitchen floor and toss out the pile of newspapers in the living room.

Charlie's life is simple, which means there is not much to do

around the house. Allison, who is as energetic as ever, always has a new messy corner of the house that needs to be sorted out. Whether it is her missing a new hobby of drying, or her giving up trying to rearrange furniture and organize some possessions.

Laundry is still going on despite my extra chores. I stood in front of the washing machine, arms crossed over my chest, eyes staring at the dagger, as if it would speed up the washing machine.

Charlie has already told me he plans to eat with Billy after fishing and I am planning to eat with Jack so no need to start eating to pass the time. Downstairs there is no other way but to carry clothes into the dryer. But going upstairs now means I must reread Hamlet or jump straight into the paper. I am not particularly eager to do it right now.

I stared at the machine for another minute before heading back to the kitchen. It did not take long for me to put together a grilled cheese sandwich, but it was long enough for

the machine to beep. After the clothes are in the dryer, I grab my sandwich and go upstairs.

My copy of Hamlet — tattered after years of reading — is sitting on my desk among the piles of books and papers. Just settled in bed, with my sandwich by my side and the bookshelf propped open in my lap, I hear my door creak.

The thought of being able to spend a few more hours with Jack makes me so excited. With a grin, I looked up. Fear of the cold immediately replaced my excitement.

It was not my tall, auburn-skinned best friend standing at my door, but another person. He was tall - as tall as Chiaz. His skin was pale—as pale as his blond hair. He leaned casually against the frame, his arms —thick muscles—crossed over his chest.

Hamlet slipped out of my hands, fell onto my mattress, and hit the floor. The man walked over, walking briskly, and picked up the book. I flinched when he approached me.

'Hamlet? One of my favorites,' he mused, his voice surprisingly low. He chuckled softly. 'I've been waiting for you for so long, but I never thought we'd have so much in common, Lily.'

I was frozen, shocked, and horrified as I stared. He did not mind my silence, he flipped through my book and smiled at the different passages.

'Who are you?' My voice was a soft whisper. I gulped heavily, trying to quell my fear and calm my

heartbeat. It did not work. How long has this person been in my house?

My mind is running. Is the front door unlocked? a window? Charlie never leaves the door unlocked. Did Melvin check the door to make sure it was locked before leaving me alone?

Melvin. Melvin could not get far. But he had not come yet, which meant he was not close enough to hear about the encounter, and Naddalin Natalie did not see anything. Or she has, Melvin is on his way.

I looked around for my phone. It did not sound. Will Melvin call to warn me? tell me to run? tell me to hide?

My phone was not on the table before I went downstairs. Panic swept through, making my stomach twitch and my chest hurting.

I feel lonely. Lonely as Emilyn found me in the woods.

'For help?' he asked, and my eyes returned to his face. He sneered, and the corners of his reddish lips raised a smug look. 'No

one's going to help you today. I am sure of that.'

Fear stung my heart. Melvin's fear, then my fear.

distract him. discourage him. Melvin's voice - the man who got me through his absence for months - whispered to me.

'There's no money in this house,' I whispered, my voice stronger now—barely. Fear stood still, shaking my words.

threaten him.

'My father is the chief of police.' The man shrugged. 'Trust me, Lily, I know.' He turned and placed my Hamlet neatly on the table where I had picked it up. 'I'm here for you.'

I wince and leave as the man approaches and sits on the bed.

'It is risky. I must say, Lily, you have a great relationship. Vampires and wolves are at your command. It is hard to do this safely. Well, for me.'

My eyes were on him, my stomach was twisted by his words.

His eyes are pale blue. Although his skin was pale, there was an undercurrent of dark red. He is clearly not a vampire. But he is not of Quileute blood. He looks like a man.

'What do you want?'

'Play with you.' He smiled calmly, looking relieved, the nausea creeping through me. His hand slid across the bed, and I pulled my body away. 'I have been waiting a long time for this. I hope you appreciate the planning of it all, but it does not make sense for a cat to explain his paws before playing with a mouse.'

Panic swelled in my veins as I tried to find Some ways to escape this situation. He was closer to the door than I was. I had to get around him to get to the door. He is human. I could have hurt him. If I can do that, I must surpass him. I at least get outside screaming so someone can help me. He is tall. He will run faster than me. I will travel with ease. I am not even sure if my voice will work, or my legs.

I was stuck in my head as I urged my body to move, fight, scream for anyone. But it does

nothing. I felt like my muscles were like syrup, my mind was processing everything, but it was frozen.

His hand reached out, faster than I expected, around my ankle. His hands were tight and my automatic kicks to free myself were futile. He crawled up beside me and put his other hand on my chest. The force of it tingled in my chest, and my vision darkened as my head slammed into the headboard behind me.

I groaned as painful tendrils wrapped around my skull and vibrated every bone in my body.

threaten him.

'Melvin will kill you.' My voice was weak, and my vision blurred as the weight of his body weighed on me. Once I bleed, Pierre has no chance. It is the same thing.

Every breath hurts. Every tingle made me feel less willing to breathe again. I am trying to remember strategies I have used before. But nothing Pierre or Emilyn does is like that.

'I count on it.' His voice was confident. 'I cannot wait for Melvin to pick me up. I cannot wait for the leader of your Coven to come to me.'

Begging him.

'Please.' My hands touched my hips, and my arms were pinned as I tried to push them away. 'Don't do it. Please.'

'You smell. Holy.' He touched my face, and my body shuddered. It reminds me of the shiver I felt this morning before Melvin left. when he kisses me. This

is different. quite different. 'I'm so happy to meet your witch, Lily.'

His warm hand caressed my chin and followed its line all the way to my neck. 'I have always been jealous of how Melvin plays with your hair. He loves it so much. He strokes it. Smell it. Breathe it.' He leaned over, and as he breathed against my hair, I felt sick and winced away. 'It is funny. You do not seem to mind - do not seem to understand that it is a predator, and it is marking what is his.' He chuckled and patted the lock

of my hair. 'You're my mark now, Lily.'

I whimpered as his hands moved across my chest, adding to my pain. My legs and hips were pressed against his weight. My hands, free, groped over him, and he growled loudly.

'Enough.' He hissed, gnashing his teeth. One of his hands wrapped around my arm, pushing it under my knee, while the other grabbed my other wrist. I was sobbing and writhing, trying to free myself.

threaten him. lie to him. Protect yourself, Lily.

'You don't know what they're capable of.' I cried, tears pooling in my eyes as I realized I was at the mercy of the man who wanted to hurt me.

He smiled, cruel and confident. 'I know exactly what they can do.' He leaned down and moved closer to me until his breath was on my neck. 'I can do better.'

Fingers dug painfully into my hip, where Melvin's hand had been a few hours earlier. A vicious

pain, worse than the searing pain in my torso or head, exploded on my skin. I did not notice the scream until it rang in my ear. He put his hand on my mouth, forced me to close my jaw, and silenced me.

The sound of the fabric is evident in the air. I burst into tears as his eyes flashed over mine. The nausea made me worse, I gagged at his hand, trying to grab his hand off me. Most desperately want to have his eyes gouged out of his skull.

A sob spilled from my closed lips, and I made up my mind

and pushed him up with my arms. My cries were nothing more than groans under his palms, and my attempts were pitifully thwarted by the pulsing pain in my body. I wish I would pass out now, but I can feel his every touch as his hands wander over me. I wrestled under him, wriggling on the muscle bands in his legs. This is completely futile.

Without the ability to fight or move, I was very aware of his body in me, the arrows of pain on my wrists and ribs, the blow to my head. I was very aware of the way his

hands separated my legs and the feeling of his fingers curling around my thighs.

I scream. My throat is burning with every vibration. But he did not seem to mind.

For a split second—less than a second—his weight changed. I took my chance and kicked hard with my left leg. He was faster than me, avoiding my movements while instantly redistributing his weight, crushing me to the ground again.

He growled angrily. His eyes darkened as he forced me into

the mattress of my bed. His palm was on my chest, and as I tried to recover from the throbbing, black spots appeared in my vision. The weight crushed my ribs and made breathing more difficult than anything else.

Please, Lily.

'Please, please.' I tried to beg. The voice became muffled. I fought against him, against the pain that radiated all over me, the panic in my blood, and his weight. But that is okay.

'Enough.' He spat. His hand left my mouth, and he sat up and

straddled my waist. I took this opportunity to contort my body as I was painfully trying to free myself. I sobbed, gasped, and screamed at the same time. My palms burned as blood rushed back to my freed wrists and fingers.

'No, no, Lily.' His fingers wrapped painfully around my wrist again, pulling me toward the bed.

I do not know what hurts more - my wrist being grabbed by him, or the pain of my head hitting the metal headboard a second time. His hands fell hard on my torso,

knocking every ounce of oxygen out of my lungs, and my body froze in shocking pain.

'Don't try that again.' He chuckled.

'Please.' I whispered weakly, panting heavily.

'It's not the way I want it to be,' he yelled angrily.

He grabbed my wrist with both hands and thought for a moment. 'There's beauty in victims who want to fight. I love it. It is poetic,' he said, shaking his head. 'I

used to do this to my wife. She is beautiful, much more beautiful than you, Lily. She used to fight me too, but she was weak. Easy to tame.'

He sighed again.

My head was pounding, and I was trying to catch his words as he spoke. My hearing feels hazy.

I remember the night I was surrounded in Big Sur. When Melvin saved me before it was too late. But now he is not here. It is too late.

The fog that enveloped my senses did not diminish my pain and

consciousness. This is so torturous. My vision blurs with every suffocation.

Convince him.

'Please. I will not tell them. Please stop.' I whimper, my voice shaking. My jaw hurts every time I say a word.

'It is tempting. But if they do not know what I did, how do I kill them?' He chuckled. 'I love you begging. My wife used to beg. But she was easier. She begged but did not fight. You were fighting, making it difficult for both me and you.'

He stroked my cheek with his hand and wiped it away Tears on my cheeks. 'I need you to tell them, Lily,' he said softly. 'I need them to come after me.'

Fight him, Lily.

My cheeks were burning where his hands were. He wiped my tears and looked like he cared about me.

I breathe slowly, trying to calm myself down. Trying to control my sobbing and pain. If I can think, I can fight.

'I want you to feel it.' He snorted sadly. 'I'm ready,' I said. You have lived too long to be weak like my wife Lily. I do not want to use it, but I want to know, don't I?'

He was leaning against me, the shiny syringe in his palm. 'Rohypnol. Have you heard of it? 'He pointed at the needle and looked remorseful.

All my composure was gone in an instant, my breathing became uncontrollable, and I cried, arching my back desperately to push him

away. Trying to run away before he injected, I used That medicine.

He ignored me and continued talking. 'I have never used it with my wife. But she is easier, as I told you. My

body tensed as he pushed the needle into my abdomen in mid-March. The sting of the needle was strangely focused on the broken bone fragments vibrating around my body.

My vision blurred my tears, quickly deformed. Sharp colors distorted by tears softened. Tones barely separated until they merged.

Hug colors, my pain lessened. I was cold - like lying naked on ice. The ice covered the pain and drained my energy. I could not move, but I barely wanted to. I was so tired and confused by the color.

Do not give up.

It is easy to give up control, give up the fight, and ignore Melvin's voice in my head. I let the cold and darkness overcome me. I keep my eyes closed and my vision darkened with relief. I embraced the dreary sights around me that numbed my pain and suffering.

Against the background of my silence, all I know is that I want Melvin.

'Lily?!'

screamed loudly. Too noisy. My head was pounding with pain.

'Lily?!'

Too loud. Too noisy. The pressure exploded inside my skull, on my brain.

'Oh—oh my God! Lily!'

Too loud. too close. It hurts.

'Lily, wake up!' Hand on me. Hands caressing me. I want to scream. I want to fight. 'Open your eyes! Please—open your eyes! Open your eyes, Lily!'

I tried. I tried to open my eyes and mouth so he could leave me. Stop screaming. Make it painless.

'Wait, Lily. Wait--wait.' He was in pain. His voice was full of the pain I felt.

Pain erupted in my body, and I could feel my painful cries vibrate in my pounding head. I tried

to force my eyes open, but everything was watercolor. Brown, blue, and white stripes. The colors swayed and blended, making my stomach churn and my eyes hurt.

'You'll be fine. Just—wait a minute. Okay? Please. You will be fine.' The voice was pleading. Loud,

I was being jostled and moved and I felt so sick. Why don't they understand it is painful? Why is everything so painful?

I envy the dead. I envy dead girls.

When I opened my eyes again, the watercolors were brighter. They were so bright my eyes were burning with pain. I can feel the light even behind my eyelids.

'Oh dear!'

'That's it.'

'Sir, what happened? Sir?'

'I need help! Please!'

screamed even more. More please. More begging. He likes to beg. more pain. More screaming. Too noisy. Everything is too loud.

'Put her here.'

'No, no!' so loudly. The sound is so loud. 'Don't touch her! Stay away from me! No!'

'Put her down and let me take care of her.'

I knew the voice. The voice had never been angry, but now it was. It is also very loud. It hurts.

'No! Find someone else! No, no, no! It is him! He did it!'

'He's not here now,' said the angry voice.

Both sounds need to stop being so loud. I am sleepy. I want the

pain to stop. I want to dim bright lights.

'Chiaz, put her down, now...'

My head was about to explode. I am going to be sick. I wanted to open my eyes and tell Chiaz to stop. Stop moving me, stop shaking me.

'Lily, I'll take care of you, sweetheart.' Another voice. Not Chiaz's voice. Very peaceful. It is soft. It was finally quiet. I want them to take me away from pain. It was so painful.

'I know it hurts.' It was soft. 'I'll give you some medicine to help you.' The

movement stopped. But my pain is not.

'I need an IV.'

'Lill, can you open your eyes?'

'Do an ultrasound of me. Internal bleeding.'

'I need a faster IV!'

'Lill, can you listen? Should I speak?' There

were too many voices. too much sound. I wanted to scream for them to stop, but I was acutely aware of the throbbing pain in my jaw.

'This is an ultrasound, Dr. Shezor.'

Dr. Shezor. My mind seems dull. I know that name. Melchor?

'Head injury. We need CT.' The voice was louder, angrier.

Yes. Melchor

My eyes snapped open to the dazzling light when panic

suddenly came over me. He will know. He is going to have a look.

'No.' My own voice was so loud that I winced. The whole room was spinning - faces and colors blurred so fast I could not orient myself.

'Lill, it's all right, you're in the hospital.'

No.'

'Lily,' Melchor's voice was soft, quiet, close. 'You're safe. You are with me,' he told me. My eyes swept across the room, trying to

determine where he was. The color of his blond hair is so familiar I wince until he speaks again. 'I know it hurts. I am going to make it stop.'

I wanted him to take me away from the pain and the lights. Make it all go away again. Everything hurts.

A small sob came out of my lips. His angelic figure is watery and indistinct. I could barely see his bright hair flickering in the light as he moved.

'I'm going to have an ultrasound, it won't hurt.' He agreed gently.

'I'm cold.' My tongue felt swollen and heavy in my mouth. I cannot form words correctly.

'Lill, you are all right. We will give you some painkillers.'

Someone stroked me, pressing uncomfortably against my hip.

My breath was punched, and I heard the echo of my screams in my ears. This time my body listens

to me, trying to ignore the black dots that block my vision as I move. But my body broke down before I could do anything. My muscles are too weak. My bones are also broken. My vision is too blurry. My stomach churned as the room swirled.

'No, no.' My jaw hurts every time I say a word. I cannot breathe.

Why does it hurt so badly?

'Please, no, no, no. Please.'

'Enough.' The word made my heart pound, and it just made my

body fight more with the hands and the pain.

'Lily.' Melchor's voice was right next to me. 'You're safe. You are fine. You are in the hospital.'

His voice was muffled. I am about to suffocate. I cannot breathe.

'I can't breathe.' I gasped. I am begging.

The pressure in my chest darkened my vision.

'Decreased breath sounds on the left, Dr. Shezor. Did she puncture her lung? Pneumothorax?'

'Lily,' Melchor breathes. 'I am going to take care of you. Take slow, deep breaths for me, Lily.'

Icy hands were touching me. My eyes close, shutting out the watercolors. He said I was safe. I moan, trying to arch away from the cold.

'You're okay, Lily.'

'This is going to pinch a little, darling.' Another voice says. It was right. A sharp string in my side makes me squeeze my eyes shut with a startled cry.

'It hurts.' I protest, my voice incoherent even to my own ears.

Little stabs of pain shot through my whole body as I tried to move away, but my body was too heavy. The pressure in my chest frustrates me. The icy hands keep moving. They are there, making me shiver. Then they are gone, making me grateful for the warmth until they come back again.

They were talking. My vision was bright and blurry, the pressure in my chest easing. The

pain was gone, too. With bewildered relief, I lie still as the cold hands keep working.

'. The police down here.'

'. Bleeding into her abdomen. She needs surgery.'

'No.' I whimpered. There was pressure building in my chest, pressing down on my lungs and throat. I did not want surgery. I did not want the police.

'Melchor.' I slur his name, not sure if he could even hear me.

'You're doing so well, Lily. Just a little longer.' he tells me. He is close to me. His voice is close to my ear.

'I'll call the OR.'

The pressure was building, sending a stab of pain deep through me. I groan, gasping for air as the pain recedes.

'She's conscious. Should we do a rape kit now?'

The words are muffled, and I am almost sure they did not exist

until I heard them again. Cold dread floods through me.

I did not want it again. I did not want that again. He said I was safe.

'No. Melchor, please. Do not.' It hurt to cry, and the pain made me cry harder. The pressure made me cry harder. 'Please, no.' I am cringing away again, feeling his cold hands holding me down.

'I'm so sorry, Lily.' Melchor voice was quiet in my ear, remorseful. 'Sedate her.'

Another sharp pain in my side. The same side he injected me. I gasped, feeling as if I could not breathe.

'I'm so sorry, Lily.' Melchor whispers.

The edges of my vision were black, and I could not move as more hands touched me.

'No.' My voice is slurred, even to my own ears. The weight of my body crushes in on itself, and the pain - though fading - is dragging me under with it. My eyes close against

my will - muted colors turning to pure black.

'Sleep, Lily.' Melchor tells me. 'Let me take care of you now. No one is going to hurt you anymore.'

I want to tell him no. I want to tell him to take me away. I do not want to be here. I do not want it to hurt. I try to form words on my tongue, but I am under a hundred pounds of sand.

I hear Melchor's voice as I lose my grasp on reality.

I was aware of the coolness covering my body before anything else. Someone had covered me in a sheet of ice - perfectly molded to fit every crevice and curve of my body. Ice is unable to melt against the warmth that once existed in my skin.

There was a buzzing in my ear that was entirely aggravating, but unable to be quelled by anything. My body felt absolutely fatigued, and my mind dragged sluggishly after it.

Moronically, and quite morbidly, I wondered if this was

what insects felt like when put in the freezer. Sluggish. Fatigued. Dead.

I wondered if I would ever slip past the fatigue long enough to get up and grab a blanket. I could call Charlie and he would grab one for me. If Melvin were with me - and the source of the ice - he would get me one faster and more silently than Charlie could. But if Melvin was the cause, why didn't he notice me shivering?

With a bitterness I despised, my mind races to our previous conversation. He was

hunting. Of course, he was not here now.

I could just curl up into a tight ball and try to sleep. Then no one - I included - needed to be bothered with grabbing the blanket.

Just like those poor insects, I was well on my way to death, it seemed.

'Lill, darling, can you hear me?'

Yes, of course I could. You were practically screaming in my ear. Did no one understand the

concept of talking at a reasonable volume? I thought we would all learn that in preschool.

'Open your eyes, dear.'

But I try. Because if I could open my eyes, then I could open my mouth and tell the voice to shut up. My muscles are slightly more cooperative than I expect, considering that I was a frozen bug on my way to death.

When I do open my eyes, I am faced with a dark room. Everything was blurry - all the shapes and colors blending into soft

hues. The dull colors hardly quaked the nausea I suddenly felt. The room was shaking like an earthquake was ravaging McAuley, Washington.

That was strange.

I was elevated - the surface beneath me folding up to prop my torso up - and now that my eyes were open, I could see that there was no ice covering my body. I was just cold.

'Ah, it's good to see those eyes open.' The same voice from before said. It was much quieter now. I turn my head, wincing immediately at the pain I felt as I did

so. Blinking as the pain receded, I watched the colors separate into slightly distinct objects. White walls. Pink vinyl chairs. Tan doors.

A woman was standing at the foot of my bed. She was holding a strange, grey-colored binder. Her blonde hair was pulled tight, her face in a strange sort of scowl that enhanced her wrinkles.

'How are you feeling?' Her voice was not soft, and I flinched.

My mouth feels like someone stuffed cotton balls into it. I ran my tongue over my lips, noticing

how dry and cracked my whole mouth felt.

'You took a long while to wake up.' The woman says. She was wearing mint green scrubs. 'Don't move your shoulder.'

I blink slowly, my thoughts flurry as I process her dramatic words.

What happened to my shoulder?

The bluntness of her voice wrapped up with her scowl makes my stomach twist.

I stare at her, remembering her scrubs. Was she a doctor? A nurse? Has she introduced herself? I could not remember.

Did she tell me what happened to my shoulder? I had not broken it, had I?

'Water. Please.' My throat burned, and my voice was hoarse and slurred. Judging by the lack of response, I am sure I was hardly comprehendible and much too quiet. Did my shoulder injury impact my throat? Or other way around. How would my throat break my shoulder?

I never paid enough attention to the anatomy section of Biology. I was more focused on getting sick.

'You gave us quite a scare.' The woman says, though her voice is curt, and the words feel strange coming from her. 'Well, can you tell me what happened?'

□□□□□□ I swallow thickly, grimacing as I realize the pain was present again. I did not remember being sick or having a sore throat or breaking my arm.

I gave her - or, rather, us - quite a scare. I did not know what she could mean.

My eyelids fell shut, realizing with an exhausting breath that I was both confused and tired. It was difficult to focus on being confused when I was this tired. But it was difficult to get myself tired when I had questions.

The woman with the scowl also had questions, and she was not letting up.

'Lill? It is imperative that I know what happened.' I open my

eyes, but they fall shut again. She was not looking at me. She was looking at the binder and talking mostly to herself. The words faded in and out. 'Luckily, you have not showered. Collect DNA. You were unconscious before. Did not need consent.'

My shoulder. Something on my shoulder. I open my eyes, blinking as I try to clear away the distorted colors again. The colors were shifting, moving.

'Some more morphine. and then I will get the exam done easily.'

The woman taps my arm. 'Are you in pain, Lill?'

'Nurse Wicker, I can take this from here.'

I blink again, watching as a new person with striking blonde hair and pale skin entered the room. Melchor.

The woman - the nurse - jumps, looking startled. 'Oh, Dr. Shezor, I didn't hear you come in.'

He smiles in response.

'I just need to take her vitals.' She continues, reaching for

something beyond my head. My eyes shift to Melchor, he is watching me with a cautious expression.

'I can do that, thanks.' Melchor offers in a gentle, yet firm voice. 'Is this her file?'

The nurse looks defiantly at him, her fingers curling around the binder more tightly. She seemed to have abandoned the thing she was reaching for. 'I'm assigned to her case.'

Melchor pauses, smiling. 'I appreciate that. I will page if you are needed.'

The nurse huffs as she hands over the binder, turning on her heels. I watch her body get blurrier as she walks away, her mint green scrubs blending into the tan and white of the walls. The door shuts loudly behind her when she leaves, and I flinch again as the noise pounds into my head.

Melchor moves closer to me, pulling up a chair and sitting down. 'I must apologize, Lily. I intended to be here when you woke but I was caught in a meeting.' Melchor shakes his head slowly.

'Though, I believe, Nurse Wicker had something to do with your waking when I was busy.'

I stared at him, quizzically, not understanding his words. I was too tired to ask him to explain, though, when he continued.

'Let's not worry about her for now.' He frowns, his eyes flickering to mine momentarily.

Melchor reaches past my field of vision, procuring a plastic cup with a white straw. Relief floods through me as I realize how dry my

mouth and tongue feel, and he guides the straw to my mouth.

I sip greedily, trying to ignore as my throat protests with each gulp. The water is at room temperature and does little to soothe my throat.

Melchor's hand sweeps across my forehead, and I shiver against his cold touch.

'You were running a slight fever before, but it is going now. That is a good sign.' He murmurs gently. 'Are you in any pain?'

My throat. My throat hurts. I want to immediately blurt it out, but my muscles feel like molasses. I really did not want to speak.

'You had surgery, Lily.' Melchor says, as if he could read my mind. 'The breathing tube will have made your throat a bit sore.'

Had Melchor and Melvin switched gifts recently? Moreover, how was he able to read my mind?

'Karly is making you some soup to help the soreness.' He continues, moving the cup away. 'I am sure she will bring some soon.

We certainly did not expect to have you awake so soon, but I am pleased you are.'

'It doesn't hurt that much.' My voice was a horse whisper. My wince coinciding with my words must have given my lie away.

'She's not put out, Lily.' He smiles, chuckling quietly. 'How do you feel?'

For a moment, the only sound in the room was the steady beeping of monitors. My head was hurting - from the annoyance of the sounds.

'My shoulder.' I whispered, though even I heard disbelief in my voice. My shoulder did not hurt. Nothing hurt - except my head and my throat. 'She said. I do not remember.'

Melchor smiles softly, reaching to touch my arm. 'It's just a blood pressure cuff.' He murmurs. 'You must have been moving when we were trying to get a reading.'

The Velcro makes my head pound as it is stripped off itself. Then Melchor slides the cuff off my arm, showing it to me.

'Oh.' I mumble, feeling utterly ridiculous and slightly embarrassed. A blood pressure cuff. 'The beeping.'

'Heart monitor.' He responds gently. He understood my frustration at the beeping because he eventually reached above me, turning the monitor off. The room dims as the illumination of the monitor disappears from the room.

'Oh.' I swallow thickly, feeling even worse. 'I thought - she said not to move.'

I closed my eyes, wishing I understood more of what was happening. I had been to the hospital plenty of times - but I do not ever remember waking up in one with little recollection of why I was there.

I open my eyes, watching Melchor as he watches me with tightened eyes.

'Lily, do you know where you are?' His voice was casual, and he leaned back in his chair slowly. My eyes crawl over the vinyl chair and then back over my body under the ice blanket.

I blink once, and then repeatedly. Nothing quite made sense. 'McAuley Hospital.'

I felt strangely queasy. I did not smell blood, though. Still, I took slightly more tentative breaths, prepared to hold my breath if needed.

Melchor reaches out, touching his fingers to my wrist. 'Yes, you are.' His voice masked with pain. Melchor could not hide his compassion if he tried, and he rarely tried. 'Do you know why you're here?'

My thoughts flickered back to the nurse and her warning not to move my shoulder. It was just a blood pressure cuff, though. Not at all what I imagined it was.

I tried to remember - what had I done? What landed me in the hospital with a stay that required surgery and left me with a splitting headache and a sore throat. The pounding of my head almost mocked me - nearly encouraging me to try and think and make it hurt more.

A fuzzy memory popped into my head - Melvin, standing

before me, instructing me not to get hurt.

I moan, closing my eyes. If my eyes stayed closed, the room would stop shaking. 'Melvin is going to be so worried.' I open my eyes, trying to glance around the room. I could barely make out anything behind Melchor. 'Where is he?'

'He's on his way.' Melchor tells me easily. 'He was hunting.'

'He told me not to get hurt.' I grimace as I speak the words. Of course, this would happen. Of course, he would leave me, and I

would end up in the hospital. He would not ever let me out of his sight again.